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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7716  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 001734

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2023

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: FM ABDALLAH BIN ZAYED: "I'M THRILLED TO BE HERE"

Classified By: CDA Patricia Butenis for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (S) Summary: MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus and S/I Satterfield met June 5 with UAE Foreign Minister Abdallah Bin Zayed (ABZ) at the conclusion of his visit to Baghdad. ABZ said he planned to announce the appointment of an ambassador to Baghdad within the next few days, and hoped to then open a UAE mission here within the next few weeks. By doing so, he hoped to prod the other Arab neighbors to follow suit -- especially Saudi Arabia. He said Maliki had agreed to renew the Iraq-UAE Joint Commission; one issue ABZ thinks the Commission will need to take up is the problem of visitors to the Emirates using fake Iraqi passports. General Petraeus briefed ABZ on recent security gains in Iraq, and all three discussed the problems posed by Iran's quest for regional dominance. In a pull-aside at the end of the meeting, ABZ offered to do whatever he could to help the SFA/SOFA gain traction and to help make the upcoming Friends of Iraq conference a success. On a regional note, ABZ noted that the UAE had recently hosted Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and FM Walid Muallim, who were anxious to stress the potential regional benefits of Syrian-Israeli peace. While Bashar listened and nodded approvingly, Muallim said that if peace talks with Israel led to an agreement, Syria would no longer have a need to host radical Palestinian groups, and Lebanon's Hizballah would have no reason to hang onto its weapons. End summary.

ABZ Announces UAE Embassy

¶2. (S) At the conclusion of his day-long visit to Baghdad on June 5, UAE Foreign Minister Abdallah Bin Zayed met with MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus and S/I Satterfield. ABZ said he was "thrilled to be here" and proud to be making such an historic visit. "My only regret is that it took some time to make this (the visit) happen," he said. General Petraeus and S/I Satterfield warmly welcomed him and commended him for making a visit that held enormous symbolic importance for Iraq and its neighbors.

¶3. (S) "I am very keen to get a UAE mission up and running as soon as possible," said ABZ, who added (as he had just publicly announced during a press conference with Iraqi FM Zebari) that he planned to announce an ambassador to Baghdad within the next few days, and hoped to establish an embassy within a couple of weeks. S/I Satterfield promised to help in any way possible to make that vision a reality.

An Example for the Arab Neighbors

¶4. (S) Speaking bluntly, ABZ said he had been contemplating this visit for the past six months, but had held off so as not to undermine his Arab neighbors. However, given current conditions (i.e., the post Charge of the Knights atmosphere) it was time to act. He hoped his visit would encourage the Arab neighbors to follow suit, especially the Saudis. S/I Satterfield recounted a recent discussion with Saudi Prince Saud, who wondered whether Maliki's recent actions against Shia militias were merely tactical or truly strategic.

Satterfield pointed out that a succession of tactical results, if sustained, can be strategically significant, and that the Saudis could play a critical role in bringing that about. He said that any help ABZ could provide in persuading the Saudis to engage with the GOI would be greatly appreciated.

15. (S) ABZ noted that the Saudis are sometimes slow to take necessary decisions. To illustrate, he recounted how, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the UAE proposed that it, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the Government of Pakistan (GOP) all break relations with the Taliban simultaneously. ABZ recounted that the Saudis asked to delay the announcement for a day, and then another day, and so on until finally the GOP and then later the UAE acted by themselves. The day after the UAE broke relations with the Taliban, the Saudis finally followed suit. According to ABZ, years later a Saudi prince told him that had it not been for the UAE's decisive action, the Saudis would still be struggling to decide whether to break relations with the Taliban.

16. (S) Satterfield noted that other Arab states, with the exception of Syria, were also moving in the right direction on Iraq. Jordan's King Abdallah, for example, would soon host PM Maliki in Amman, and would announce the appointment of a Jordanian ambassador to Baghdad a few days later.

#### Passports

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17. (S) ABZ noted that he had a good meeting earlier in the day with Prime Minister Maliki, and had cleared up any misunderstandings that Maliki may have had about the UAE's position towards him and his government. In addition, he said he had extended invitations to Maliki, President Talabani, and Speaker Mashadani to visit the UAE. Moreover, he and the Iraqis agreed that it was time to get the Iraq-UAE Joint Commission functioning again -- not least so it could tackle the problem of fake Iraqi passports. "The Iraqis believe that we are taking a position against them (when we refuse to admit Iraqis), but in fact it is very problematic for us to have people coming from Iran and entering the UAE with fake identities," said the UAE Foreign Minister. S/I Satterfield observed that the USG might be able to help, having worked closely with the Iraqis on improving the integrity of their passports.

#### Security Situation/Iran

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18. (S) General Petraeus provided ABZ with a quick yet incisive brief of Iraq's improved security climate, along with an analysis of the regional dynamics affecting that climate. In this regard, he emphasized the need for a true coalition of regional states to make clear to the Iranians that their behavior is causing enormous concern -- and that both Iraq and its neighbors refuse to allow Iraq to become "Lebanonized." In addition, he noted the need to split Syria away from Iran and bring it back into the Arab fold.

19. (S) "Let me say how grateful we are to you, your government, and to your men and women who have done such a fantastic job in stabilizing Iraq and the region," said ABZ. Recent events, he continued, have no doubt sent a strong message to Iran. "We are quite worried about the situation in Iraq, and we don't want to see radicalism spread in the region," he added. Acknowledging the special relationship between the U.S. and Israel, ABZ suggested that it would be useful for Washington to frame its objections to Iran's nuclear activities not only in terms of protecting Israel, but also of protecting the Arabian Gulf states against Iranian intimidation. "Imagine the pressure Iran could bring to bear on us if it had a nuclear bomb," said ABZ. S/I Satterfield agreed that an important aim of Iran's nuclear program was to establish strategic dominance over the region.

#### Syria

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¶10. (S) Turning to Syria, ABZ recalled that during a recent visit to the UAE, Syrian President Bashar al-Asad boasted of being the first to announce the opening of a Syrian embassy in Beirut. However, Bashar claimed that before proceeding he needed two things: First, a request from all of Lebanon's factions that Syria open an embassy; and second, assurances that the Lebanese understand what the consequences of opening an embassy will be. Bashar then elaborated on the second point, saying that opening an embassy would necessitate the dissolution of the Lebanese-Syrian High Commission, which in turn meant "ending all the agreements" between Damascus and Beirut. So, for example, the SARG would no longer prohibit Syrian farmers from growing bananas (currently banned so as to favor Lebanese banana farmers) and would stop supplying fuel and electricity to Lebanon.

¶10. (S) ABZ related that Bashar, who had been asked about peace talks with Israel, said the talks were "promising." Reportedly, Bashar listened and nodded approvingly as FM Muallim pointed out how a peace agreement between Damascus and Tel Aviv would benefit the region. Muallim argued that, if the talks succeeded, Damascus would no longer have a need to host radical Palestinian groups on its territory ("why should we help them?" Muallim asked rhetorically), nor would Lebanese Hizballah have any need to hang onto its weapons. ABZ added that even though Bashar let Muallim do all the talking on this point, it was clear that Muallim was conveying Bashar's message.

¶11. (S) On a related note, ABZ asked whether it was true that the number of foreign fighters crossing the Syrian border had diminished in the wake of the Doha Agreement on Lebanon. General Petraeus confirmed there were fewer fighters lately, but stressed that the reduction was not due to any Syrian action. He credited regional efforts against the foreign terrorist and facilitator network as also reducing the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq. He added that the Syrians needed to wake up and realize that their support of foreign fighters would come back to bite them, as the secular Syrian regime would certainly be in Al-Qaeda's gun sights after Iraq.

Pull-Aside  
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¶12. (S) During a pull-aside at the end of the meeting, ABZ offered to provide whatever help he could on the SFA/SOFA currently being negotiated with Iraq. S/I Satterfield and General Petraeus welcomed this offer and assured ABZ that the talks were not in crisis -- but acknowledged that both the Iranians and the Sadrists have launched a concerted campaign against the SOFA. To defeat this campaign, Iraqi leaders need to make statements emphasizing that the current negotiations are based on full respect for Iraq's sovereignty, are transparent, and that there is no question of the U.S. establishing permanent bases in Iraq. ABZ suggested that it would be useful for the Ambassador and General Petraeus to emphasize these points at the upcoming Friends of Iraq conference in Abu Dhabi. He offered to do whatever he could to help make the conference a success.

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